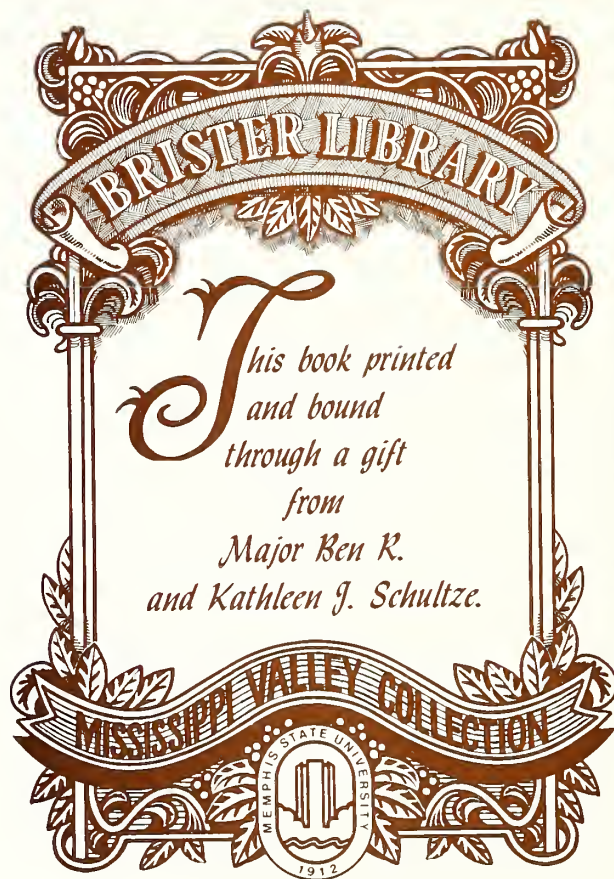


THE ROBERT R. CHURCH FAMILY  
INTERVIEW WITH MR. L. RAYMOND LYNOM

BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD  
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE  
MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY





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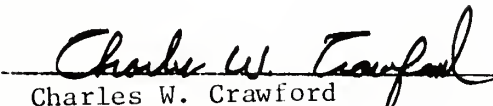
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PLACE Memphis, Tennessee

DATE July 6, 1983

  
L. Raymond Lynom  
(INTERVIEWEE)

  
Charles W. Crawford  
(For the Mississippi Valley Archives  
of the John Willard Brister Library  
of Memphis State University)



THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THE PROJECT IS ROBERT R. CHURCH FAMILY. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR. L. RAYMOND LYNOM. MISS ROBERTA CHURCH WAS ALSO PRESENT. THE DATE IS JULY 6, 1983. THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE. TRANSCRIBED BY BETTY WILLIAMS. INTERVIEW I.

DR. CRAWFORD: To begin with, Mr. Lynom, I would like to get a little information about you, when and where you were born and anything about your family and where you grew up. Then we will get into your recollections if that is all right with you.

MR. LYNOM: Well, I am a third generation Memphian. I have lived here all my life. I attended Memphis schools.

DR. CRAWFORD: When were you born and where you born in Memphis?

MR. LYNOM: Oh yes, July 21, 1913.

DR. CRAWFORD: And a couple generations of your family had lived here before.

MR. LYNOM: That's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: What part of town did you grow up in, sir?

MR. LYNOM: I grew up in North Memphis or northeast Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you went to school in the city here?

MR. LYNOM: Oh yes. I was born in southwest Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: How old were you when you first knew any members of the Church family, Mr. Lynom?

DR. CRAWFORD: I would say about 18 years old. I had been a con-





vert and a follower of the Church activities, successes and trials ever since I was a lad. Most of us as a boy we always had someone as a hero. He was my hero. I kept up with him.

DR. CRAWFORD: Your family had known Robert Church.

MR. LYNOM: Oh yes, my grandfather and all of them supported him politically and otherwise. But I was talking about me myself.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. Do you remember the first time you ever saw Mr. Robert Church, Jr?

MR. LYNOM: Yes, my dad carried me down on Beale Avenue. That was the first time I saw him.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you see his office? Did you see him there?

MR. LYNOM: Yes, I frequented his office after maturing and becoming a man in the early days.

DR. CRAWFORD: What were your first recollections of Church Park? I know this was the heyday of the park.

MR. LYNOM: Oh yes, I believe my first visit to the park at that time was when one of the schools were holding a commencement exercise at the park. As I recall, we didn't have but two parks. That was Church Park developed with the auditorium and all with Church family money. You had an outlying park called Douglas Park.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was a very colorful time. What do you remember about Church Park--how it looked and what was there?

MR. LYNOM: To me as a lad it was one of the largest buildings



I had seen. One thing that stayed in my mind for years was an outside hydrant that we would turn on and play with the water and throw it against our face as a boy.

DR. CRAWFORD: Children liked to be at the park then?

MR. LYNOM: Oh yes indeed.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were the crowds large then?

MR. LYNOM: Good and better all the time.

DR. CRAWFORD: You grew up during the twenties and then during the Great Depression?

MR. LYNOM: That's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember your first meeting with Mr. Robert Church?

MR. LYNOM: As an adult I would go to the mass convention that the Republican Party had here. So you may say I was a little squirt with an echo there, but I was always interested in government. I wanted to see how those processes of things worked. Of course I learned. I would say that most older citizens here whatever they knew, or whatever they know, they learned it from the Churches.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were a young man then and you had inspiration from people who had gotten things started.

MR. LYNOM: Very definitely. Frankly, Mr. Crawford, we looked at Mr. Church as our emancipator. You probably know or have heard that Memphis was held in the grip of strict segregation and many instances oppression. We would read about Mr. Church's exploits and his visit to the White House and at that time it was almost unknown for Negroes to go to the White House.





We each felt that if we were to be delivered, Mr. Church would be the one to do it.

DR. CRAWFORD: What do you remember about these meetings? Were these meetings of the Lincoln League?

MR. LYNOM: Yes, principally the Lincoln League.

DR. CRAWFORD: What do you remember about the Lincoln League meetings?

MR. LYNOM: The Lincoln League meetings were held to inspire our Negroes [I use Negro more than Black so you'll understand that] to register to vote. Dr. Jackson and others tried to drill it into young folk that we were somebody. Principally that is what went on at the meetings. We were really teaching them citizenship.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were they inspirational to young people?

MR. LYNOM: Most certainly. As a matter of fact, it was through Mr. Church that I first heard Roscoe Conkling Simmons. He was quite an orator. I don't know whether you have heard of him at that time?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir.

MR. LYNOM: He gave much inspiration to the younger men.

DR. CRAWFORD: I suppose you had other inspiring speakers in too, didn't you, at the Lincoln League meetings?

MR. LYNOM: Oh yes. We had many whites. I don't recall all their names now. We had Jeff Hender Wilson who was a long head of the Elk movement. Incidentally, the Negroes in Memphis would not have had an Elk organization had it not been for Colonel Church.



MISS CHURCH: I just wanted to get back to the fact that when you were an adult you went to some of those conventions. Were they at the courthouse--those mass meetings?

MR. LYNOM: Oh yes.

MISS CHURCH: I didn't know if that was along the line that you were going to tell.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you join the Elks, Mr. Lynom?

MR. LYNOM: Yes, I joined the Elks, but I was not considered an active worker in the Elks. I was more inclined to civic and political than I was fraternal.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you go to any national meetings?

MR. LYNOM: Yes, as a matter of fact, I went as an alternate delegate to the convention that Mr. Eisenhower was nominated.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir, in 1952.

MR. LYNOM: I believe it was, yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: What city was that one held in?

MR. LYNOM: That was in Chicago, I believe.

DR. CRAWFORD: That would have been his first nomination, I believe, wouldn't it have been, sir? He was nominated in '52 and '56.

MR. LYNOM: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe one was in Chicago and the other one may have been in Denver.

MR. LYNOM: No, I didn't go to Denver.

DR. CRAWFORD: What do you remember about the Chicago convention?

MR. LYNOM: Well, frankly I went there in the Tennessee





delegation and they were more or less committed to Senator Taft. I thought Senator Taft would have won it. I got some lessons in politics (laughter) with a steam roller. On arriving there I saw Eisenhower buttons and the Eisenhower people. And to be frank the most of the Taft people almost looked like farmers as against the Eisenhower people. (Laughter) That may come as strange but that was my view of it.

DR. CRAWFORD: I remember that year. My father was active in the Republican Party and I remember the buttons. As a matter of fact, I think I still have some of the buttons from that year.

MR. LYNOM: Pardon me, I believe prior to that convention or a month or so before the convention, I believe that was the month that Colonel Church passed. Am I correct?

MISS CHURCH: He passed, I think, in about April and the convention was in June.

MR. LYNOM: Yes, I knew it was prior to that.

MISS CHURCH: He was going to the convention as Eisenhower's supporter, but my question to you, if I may revert to that, was about these mass meetings at the courthouse here in Memphis not the national convention, but where you said you went, where you had the differences.

MR. LYNOM: But Dr. Crawford's line was toward the national when he used the convention. I believe that was what it was and that is why I answered to that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Can we talk about the activities prior to that when you were here?



MR. LYNOM: I'm glad you mentioned that, Dr. Crawford. Colonel Church, I won't go into details, taught me one of my greatest lessons up in Nashville. He was there at the state convention. Just his presence there seemed to changed the convention when he walked in there. The respect and almost homage that the white elected officials and all deferred to Mr. Church. That is exactly what they did. The deferred to him.

We were sitting back in the Ryman Auditorium where they were having the state convention at that time. We had several leaders here. Of course, as a delegate to the state convention, and the state committee we had among our state elected committeemen, a Negro here. This Negro gave good service too, but he sat back there with us and all the other state committeemen were on the platform. Mr. Church walked in and he saw him sitting there and he wanted to know why aren't you on the platform. Well, something he told him and he (Church) said, "Get on up there! I mean right now!" And he got. He was a protege of Mr. Church's. It just shows you the type of influence Mr. Church had and he wasn't living here at the time.

DR. CRAWFORD: And he had been to many conventions before. He knew something about how they were run.

MR. LYNOM: That's it exactly. So without a peer or during my lifetime he is the greatest political, you might say humanitarian, that we have had. Now there are a lot of folk who have given things to charity and to other things, but really in so giving they gave it in such a way that the recipients only received the interest off the money. The principal stayed in-





tact to the donor of the giver. So it is still being done. So down on Beale you can see even just the land there that the Churches gave of themselves. Of course, they used that money to found the bank here and possibly we didn't have enough trained people to work in banking as we should. And there is no telling how much money the Church family did lose in trying to help us. They gave of their money and paid for people to work in the elections because at that time the county didn't have any money to fund especially any outside workers. Of course, through his influence in the Republican Party long before the Democrats had any idea of participating, Mr. Church saw to it that Negroes maned the ballot boxes and served as election officials primary and everything you want to name in the election process and especially in the Republican Party.

Up until Mr. Roosevelt was elected to office, I would say for more than two or three decades Mr. Church named anyone or vetoed anyone who aspired to any type of public office especially federal. And that went from the federal judges on down to your janitors. Most postmen families are back up until, I would say prior to the last fifteen years, the families ate because he made a way for them to work in the postal service here.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was very good work too.

MR. LYNOM: Yes. And it is still regarded as good work.

DR. CRAWFORD: At the Nashville convention, Mr. Lynom, what do you remember about the issues and what was settled there?

MR. LYNOM: Actually most minds were on the forthcoming



national convention. People were naturally jockeying for position to try to take the state from Mr. Eisenhower or for Mr. Taft. Of course, you had your delegates at large and you had your district delegates and all that. But Mr. Church's presence there at the convention it was a sight to behold. Really it was quite inspiring. When he would enter the convention hall, I think the last day of the convention it was moved over to the veterans building there. I forget the name of it. They beseeched him on all hands when he would walk in seeking his counsel I would presume. Not only Memphis and Tennessee but America lost much when Mr. Church was lost because his influence stretched into other states where Perry Howard in Mississippi and a lot of the rest of them they relied heavily on advice from Colonel Church.

DR. CRAWFORD: Before going to Nashville, you had the meetings here in the city. How did they go?

MR. LYNOM: There was not any question about how they would go then. There were two factions in the party. One was so called "Lily White" and the other was the faction that we worked with and was inherited from Colonel Church, the "Black and Tans." We always triumphed at every convention because there were many so-called white Republicans as they put it. They didn't think it was respectable at that time to work in the Republican party because it was actually dominated by Negroes. And why it was dominated by Negroes because we participated and we worked. You had whites who only came out to work in Republican Party at your national election time. Well, probably was for the spoils. But the Negroes were the ones who kept the party alive year in and



year out.

DR. CRAWFORD: And kept registered and worked through the years.

MR. LYNOM: That's it exactly. Of course, well, I would say the decline of Negro influence in the Republican Party here was three or four different things but principally they started gerrymandering the precincts. Where we would have five-one or five-two or five-three precincts those went over to the precincts instead of mass election for your convention and election precincts for your committeemen and all. But they combined or consolidated many of the Negro precincts which in turn reduced our voting power at your conventions.

DR. CRAWFORD: That did not happen until well after Colonel Church was gone?

MR. LYNOM: Oh that is correct. But the stage was set for it and the wheels were rolling.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well that factionalism in the Republican Party dated way back I believe even into the last century--the "Lily White" versus the "Black and Tan" faction.

MR. LYNOM: But as I mentioned the "Lily Whites" only came out of the woods at a time for your presidents.

DR. CRAWFORD: About every four years?

MR. LYNOM: That's it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember about how many delegates went to Nashville from Memphis?

MR. LYNOM: No, I don't remember exactly to be frank with you. Memphis comprised your Memphis delegates and also it was so large until we incumbents embraced the District 2.





So we in turn elected in fact your local delegates and your district delegates as well.

DR. CRAWFORD: Memphis not only was the largest town in the state it was very large in the Republican Party, you know. A lot of Republican strength was from here along with East Tennessee, of course, which was different. What else do you remember about the meeting in Nashville?

MR. LYNOM: My mind is somewhat hazy on that, Dr. Crawford.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Church joined you there, didn't he?

MR. LYNOM: Yes, that's true. Of the majority of the delegates from Tennessee, the majority pledged to Senator Taft. Is there is something you would like to refresh my memory on in reference to this convention

DR. CRAWFORD: No sir, not about the Nashville part of it. That was prior to the national convention in Chicago which I think was about in July that year. You attended that one also?

MR. LYNOM: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you a district delegate or delegate at large?

MR. LYNOM: I was a district delegate from Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: The state delegation was committed to the support at least in the beginning of Senator Taft?

MR. LYNOM: Yes, the majority.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did things change at Chicago? I know when you went there, there was a lot of Eisenhower strength that had been developing.

MR. LYNOM: Yes, it seems to me as I recall that this senator



from Pennsylvania. I think his name was Fine or whatever it was it seems to me he kind of . . .

DR. CRAWFORD: That was not Hugh Scott was it?

MR. LYNOM: No sir, it wasn't Senator Scott. I felt that in observing him. . .

MISS CHURCH: Was it the governor of Pennsylvania?

MR. LYNOM: Maybe that was who it was. I believe he double-crossed the Taft people and didn't stay in line. That kind of started the band wagon and people started asking the chairman for the floor and those who had already voted, they wanted to change their vote.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was the bandwagon.

MR. LYNOM: That's it. They wanted to change their vote. The Taft people were hurt very much, but I might say this. I believe that Senator Taft was possibly a better Republican who had paid his dues to the Republican Party, but as a Negro there was a possibility that Eisenhower to able to do more for Negroes as a president than Senator Taft would have done as president. That is just my personal opinion.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, Eisenhower had fewer obligations to old party members around the country because he was newer in the party having been in military service so long and then president of Columbia University. Were you surprised by the outcome?

MR. LYNOM: As I mentioned, when I arrived there on the first day of the convention and I saw what was happening there and the different type of people that seemed to have been



supporting Eisenhower buttons and the Taft buttons. It looked to me like all the intellectuals and all the money were on the Eisenhower side. (Laughter). I'll just be honest with you. That's the way I saw it.

DR. CRAWFORD: I remember some of those buttons. They said, "I like Ike".

MR. LYNOM: That's it and so I guess maybe I had foreseen that the Taft folks were going to have a pretty rough time of it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Had you had a chance to talk with Mr. Church any about what would be the best candidate to support and what interests would be best to support?

MR. LYNOM: Yes, I did. As a matter of fact, we were members of the same church.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you do that in Memphis or at the Nashville meeting?

MR. LYNOM: At Memphis and Nashville. He explained a lot of things to me that I don't care to go into that were beyond a doubt and as time elapsed I could see that Mr. Eisenhower for that time was the best man.

DR. CRAWFORD: He was able to make changes as a new person that Senator Taft might not have been able to make.

MR. LYNOM: That was probably because Senator Taft had to trade so many votes in the senate among other things that some folks may have called in I.O.U.'s from Senator Taft as president.

DR. CRAWFORD: The senate was very conservative back then much





more than it is now.

MR. LYNOM: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had been able to discuss this with Mr. Church here in Memphis?

MR. LYNOM: Yes. As a matter of fact, most of us always sought his counsel on things because Mr. Church was not just a local man. We regarded him as a national figure in that he knew where the action was going on and so he therefore could inform us correctly and up to date.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had time to discuss with him at the the Nashville convention?

MR. LYNOM: Oh yes. There were many things that we would discuss that you couldn't implement or put into action because the faction of the party that I worked with here at that time was working with Senator Taft. Of course, you were with an organization regardless of what your personal feelings are. To an extent you are going to go along with your organization.

DR. CRAWFORD: So the Shelby County organization was apparently committed to Senator Taft?

MR. LYNOM: Those who were in control at that time and that was the faction of white and negroes who were the "Black and Tans."

DR. CRAWFORD: As you went to Nashville?

MR. LYNOM: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Then of course, the state went that way too. Did Tennessee see this change coming? Did the Tennessee delegation change its vote also?



MR. LYNOM: On the part of Mr. Klepper who died not so long ago Mr. George Klepper who was an attorney and who I always thought was a fine man. I guess they put so much pressure on him until Mr. Klepper switched and changed his vote.

DR. CRAWFORD: So it was almost unanimous, wasn't it after a while when delegates changed from Taft to Eisenhower.

MR. LYNOM: That's it exactly.

DR. CRAWFORD: What role did Mr. Church play at the Chicago convention?

MR. LYNOM: I don't recall Mr. Church being at the Chicago convention. As I recall, he died prior to it.

DR. CRAWFORD: But he had discussed these issues with you and other delegates?

MR. LYNOM: Oh yes. He said beyond a doubt and it came out just like he said. Mr. Eisenhower won. With Mr. Eisenhower in the presidency, I didn't have any doubts that Colonel Church wouldn't have come back here long enough really to straighten this party out in Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was the first Republican victory in 24 years I believe when Eisenhower was elected in '52. It had been a long time since they were in.

MISS CHURCH: Did he tell you that he thought that Eisenhower was going to win the nomination?

MR. LYNOM: He almost told me he knew he would.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was a lot of foresight. Do you remember why he thought Eisenhower would win the nomination?

MR. LYNOM: I guess his years of experience and knowledge in



knowing the different people who were supporting Mr. Eisenhower. He knew where the water hit the wheel. He knew just about what the delegates would do and wouldn't do because he knew the people. When you work with people out there at Memphis State there is some you'll work with long enough, you just about know what they will do and what how they will stand up under certain types of pressure. And so he ought to know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Many people in the party wanted to have a candidate who could win. I think many were doubtful that Senator Taft could win that year.

MR. LYNOM: That could have been part of it. Then others thought he was too conservative. Many felt that he would be too strong and wouldn't bend. One thing that was distasteful to me and many others here and it still is for that matter. When we were children, we would ride down Lauderdale Street, the Church house, a home, was always pointed out and we didn't have many Negroes with three-story houses then. It wasn't just the house, it was what the house represented because Mr. Church called it Mr. Church's domicile there. This probably could have happened to you or any other person particularly a Negro who had been successful. And who had dared to lead. They had a fireman's convention here one year and out of all the properties in Memphis Mr. Church's home was selected to experiment on some type of solvent that could extinguish fires. To me it was almost a lynching of the Negroes of Memphis. They burned his house to the ground.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know who made the decision to do that, Mr.





Lynom?

MR. LYNOM: No, I don't, but that is the problem.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know who had something to do with it?

MR. LYNOM: No, I don't know who had something to do with it.  
It sticks in the craws in a lot of Negroes today.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was when the Crump machine was in power?

MR. LYNOM: Yes, they were still in power. I would say much of  
his philosophy still prevails.

DR. CRAWFORD: You don't remember what year that was that the  
Church home was burned?

MR. LYNOM: Was it the same year of the convention or the next  
year? I believe it was the same year of the  
convention. If I make no mistake, there's a possibility that Mr.  
Church saw the house in ruins. I am not sure. Maybe Miss Roberta  
can fill us in on that.

MISS CHURCH: Well, I can't remember either. However, I think it  
was several years prior to the convention because I  
think. No, I think you are right. I think I remember when the  
funeral procession went down Lauderdale Street, I can't remember  
to tell you the truth whether the housing project was there or  
not, but I remember my aunt saying, "The funeral procession left  
T. H. Hayes and Son and went down Lauderdale to Vance and to  
Elmwood."

MR. LYNOM: That's right because I was with it.

MISS CHURCH: She thought it was nice that they drove by his  
home. I am not sure whether it was standing or  
not. I can't remember. Now he died in 1952. I am thinking you



are right. The housing project was built subsequently to that. Maybe the house was still standing. And when he died they drove by the home. I think you are right.

MR. LYNOM: What they did in a lot of those instances where the housing was built, they left the main street intact until they had built up all in the back.

MISS CHURCH: I think the house was still standing when I ran for office down here. I remember showing it to these people who were helping me, but it was occupied and it wasn't kept up.

MR. LYNOM: Because you replaced Mrs. Seessel or was it Mrs. Hanover or one of them? Which one on the state committee? It was one of them.

MISS CHURCH: I think it was Mrs. Hanover. I remember even though I knew the circumstances were questionable as to why they selected, as you say, that piece of property, I thought it was a psychological attempt to almost intimidate the black population. But personally, I was glad the house was burned up because I hated to see it deteriorate. I wasn't glad it was burned up, but I was glad to see it gone.

MR. LYNOM: I can understand that.

MISS CHURCH: Rather than have it fall down and be mishandled, it was a relief to me to see it burned down.

MR. LYNOM: But why it was gone was what the people here didn't like.

MISS CHURCH: That was a frustration.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know, Mr. Lynom, if there was a newspaper



story when the house was burned?

MR. LYNOM: I am sure there was a story, Dr. Crawford, but I can't recall any of the details at this moment.

MISS CHURCH: I remember there was something in the Press Scimitar about it that I have that showed it in flames. Somebody sent it to us in the District and the black newspaper here whose editor was Mr. Sengstacke wrote an editorial comment on the front page and called it an act of infamy. So there was a reaction in the black community. The white papers had it more focused on the fire apparatus, but they showed the house in flames and mentioned that it was our home.

MR. LYNOM: The strange thing, Dr. Crawford, there are many whites that say they want Negroes to take their rightful position in the community, to work in charity, and drives and other community uplift programs, but when Negroes dare to step to do these things and if they attract a following of their own kind, then they are looked upon with fear, suspicion and disdain by many whites. Why? It seems to be a contradiction there.

DR. CRAWFORD: That has been true through the years hasn't it?

MR. LYNOM: I think so.

DR. CRAWFORD: When you were growing up, Mr. Church was a source of inspiration to you as someone that could succeed in that way by helping others.

MR. LYNOM: Yes, he was and certainly. That's it exactly. Because how could you aspire to any type of leadership if you didn't serve and try to learn something. Too often among the whites and well as the colored you have too many





people jump out there in front with leather longs and a big mouth to be self styled leader and they haven't served and they haven't learned anything from anybody. If you can't be willing to serve and learn, how do you expect to follow people. You don't have anything to teach them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know if other young people felt the way you did about the inspiration and the example of Mr. Church?

MR. LYNOM: Oh, there were many. That was one of the reasons they were attracted to the Republican Party. In short, having your ancestors been born into slavery, and in respect to why it was done, Lincoln and the Republican Party freed us. Republican Party was a ship to us and everything else is the sea. We who came along actually loved the Republican Party. We felt it was our salvation.

DR. CRAWFORD: And the Lincoln League focused this belief and this support for organized voters, educated the issues.

MR. LYNOM: Colonel Church established Lincoln Leagues all over the state. We used to have state meetings of the Lincoln League. It has been dormant a number of years now. My wife was sick from '64 on until '75 when she passed and you could understand I sidelined myself. I had to give up a lot of those things. I cease to be active politically. If that hadn't occurred, I do believe we would still have a active Lincoln League.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where were the state meetings held?

MR. LYNOM: In Nashville.



DR. CRAWFORD: Always?

MR. LYNOM: Usually.

DR. CRAWFORD: Sometimes in Memphis?

MR. LYNOM: Oh yes. From town to town, Knoxville, Chattanooga and Nashville.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was the Lincoln League in Memphis the strongest in the state?

MR. LYNOM: I would think so. We were the largest.

DR. CRAWFORD: Memphis was the largest town and it was very important to the Republican Party.

MR. LYNOM: We always elected state committeemen and state committeewomen consistently.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where did the Lincoln League women meet when it met in Memphis?

MR. LYNOM: Usually we met in one of Mr. Church's former buildings--the Elk Building down on Beale Street.

That's where we usually met.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you a member of the Elks but not very active?

MR. LYNOM: That's right.

MISS CHURCH: May I interrupt and ask a question.

MR. LYNOM: The Lincoln League afforded much training other than just political training, general citizenship, and we had speakers, white and colored, who would come to our meetings and talk with us and inspire us on so many, many different things.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was educational as well as political, wasn't it?

MR. LYNOM: Very definitely.



DR. CRAWFORD: And I suppose for some of the members it was the best political education they had, wasn't it?

MR. LYNOM: Why certainly. In citizenship a lot of our movements here and organizations really sprang from the Lincoln League. We organized the Council of Civic Clubs. It was at one of the Lincoln League meetings where we discussed to have our first initial organizational meeting. It sprang right out of the Lincoln League--our Council of Civic Clubs. Many of the old line Democratic leadership came out of the Lincoln League.

DR. CRAWFORD: I didn't know that.

MR. LYNOM: Yes, they came out of the Lincoln League. You see the thing about it was some of them wanted to be leaders in fact themselves and others looked around here in Memphis and they felt like they could get to the sugar tit, in short, patronage and a few jobs here by organizing the Democratic Party. You too had your Quislings or your weaker Negroes where some of the Democrats lured them over there in order to weaken the Lincoln League.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I know the Crump machine had powerful lures to draw people out and that would not be suprising I suppose that they were able to attract some.

MR. LYNOM: Back to the Church family. Some of his endeavors and successes are the Episcopal Church. When I say Episcopal Church I am thinking in terms of the Negro Episcopal Church--the majority members were Negro--was organized and formed right in Mr. Church's home. We are now over 100 years old.

DR. CRAWFORD: There is so much in Memphis that stated with the





Church family.

MR. LYNOM: And the NAACP was formed in the Church home. As I forementioned the Negro Elks here was a result and the cause of Colonel Church. I never was too social minded and the Elks had a lot of social activities. That is why I wasn't too active.

DR. CRAWFORD: So much came from that one home.

MR. LYNOM: And we owe so much even yet. You take the NAACP. There are some of those members in the present day of NAACP would have you to think there wasn't a NAACP here or that it stood still until they emerged on the scene which is not true. Back in the early forties I served as Vice President under Utilis Phillips and it took courage then under Mr. Crump here to be a member of the NAACP.

DR. CRAWFORD: Those were much harder times than now.

MR. LYNOM: That's it. But after the Brown decision (Brown versus Board of Education) and all that and the federal people would give you backing (When I say federal people, I mean federal courts.) and your nationally elected officials would give you backing. Whatever you tried to do, you had a lot of them that came forward and captivated and took over the NAACP and started working it, especially when the legal defense fund in New York started paying fees to initiate suits here. You had a whole lot of folks to become interested in the NAACP. Of course, back there when Mr. Church was here there wasn't anything much behind the average Negro but his shirttail and it was a lot of times waving in the breeze.



DR. CRAWFORD: Times were different then.

MR. LYNOM: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: I suppose that it is normal for people when they lead an organization to like to believe that it didn't amount to anything until they came along. But I think it is unfortunate that the history of the NAACP in Memphis is that some generations having to set out the tree before others enjoy the shade is good. It was hard planting time for trees early. Of course, it is different now when the federal government is generally behind what you are doing--at least a lot of its power is. You didn't have that in the '40s when you were vice president.

MR. LYNOM: No sir. Matter of fact it wasn't even popular. To be frank about it, back in the early '40s you have some who stood tall working in NAACP now who were actually afraid. At that time we even used store fronts for elections in the Republican Party in the primary. You had many Negroes, I am sorry to say at that time, that were afraid to have a ballot box out in the front yard of their business. Absolutely afraid!

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, it did take courage because businesses suffered in the Crump era if they . .

MR. LYNOM: Well, we had some who were escorted out of town and others were run out of town and others saw the way the wind was blowing and left town. (Laughter)

DR. CRAWFORD: It took courage then to do that. I could understand how people would be very doubtful about helping.

MR. LYNOM: But you don't have but one time to die! (Laughter)



And if you are dying for an honest and just cause what difference does it make.

DR. CRAWFORD: I was just remembering a quotation about that. I think this is from the poem "Horatius at the Bridge". "To every man upon this earth death cometh sooner or late. How can man die better than facing fearful odds, for the ashes of his Fathers and the temple of his gods."

MR. LYNOM: That's it.

DR. CRAWFORD: But it did take courage then.

MR. LYNOM: I feel this that it is nice that you have whites now who are embracing the Republican Party. Some, I feel, want to give Negroes a square deal in it. Others are only interested in Negroes in the party at election time when they can herd them out there to vote.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that is sort of the way it used to be, isn't it? That same division.

MR. LYNOM: Well yes, but through the Lincoln League we tried to keep alive the idea that you must vote all the time in your local elections (I meant your non-partisan elections as well as your party elections).

DR. CRAWFORD: So you concentrated on helping people to be politically active not just come out every presidential election?

MR. LYNOM: That's right, after Mr. Church and Dr. Martin left I was quite young in my early twenties that I was selected to head up your ward and precinct work in the city and county. So I guess that put me out front in recruiting people for





the party. I happened to know a lot of people in so doing. We rebuilt the party from 13 precincts and when I left it Memphis had expanded into 66 some precincts.

DR. CRAWFORD: That is a great increase.

MR. LYNOM: Yes. I loved the work and I got a lot of joy out of doing the work on pay too.

DR. CRAWFORD: So you had to take time from your business to work on that?

MR. LYNOM: Most certainly yes, but I had a very good wife who would share me to go.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you in the same business then sir?

MR. LYNOM: Yes, I am a full merchant of retail florist.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had your same business then?

MR. LYNOM: Yes. As a matter of fact it is the oldest Negro owned flower business in Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who else besides yourself helped take over the leadership when Robert Church left, Mr. Lynom?

MR. LYNOM: I think Dr. Martin temporarily took it over. He and a person named Elmer Atkins. They both left.

Then a Dr. W.O. Speight, Dr. E. N. Kettrell and Mayor Matthew Thornton, retired postman and many others went to forefront. They selected Lieutenant George W. Lee to serve in somewhat the capacity that Mr. Church had performed. We had different persons from time to time to emerge and try to carry on. The Republican Party began to (that is the Black and Tan faction) to decline under Lieutenant Lee. I don't know whether, as I was sidelined looking after an ill wife, it was his age or circumstances. Of



course, he had some pretty tough opponents there--Mr. Alan Ritt who was quite a fighter but whom I always found to be a nice person, and Mr. Lewis R. Donelson and I always found him to be a nice person but he was a hard fighter.

DR. CRAWFORD: On the other side.











